

F Friends of the Land

A newsletter of Iowa's natural resources volunteer friends groups
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Keepers of the Land is the Iowa Department of Natural Resources
volunteer program.

Help comes rolling in for Stone Park Friends

by Michael Dhar

Nothing attracts funding quite like a successful project. The Friends of Stone State Park learned that this summer, when their ambitious campground improvement project secured a bevy of new donations.

The volunteers announced a new grant, an in-kind gift and a labor donation this September, following several months of already successful fundraising.

One of the new funding sources came from Bruce Lewis of L & L Construction, who pledged to assemble two new log cabin kits – amounting to a \$7,000 in-kind donation.

Lewis and his construction crew joined a team of volunteers on Oct. 15 to assemble one of the cabins. They plan to complete the second cabin in November.

The second new funding source came from the Loess

Hills Alliance, which announced an \$8,000 grant. That money will fund the campground improvement project's third phase, which calls for a 30-year-old shower

the project's second phase.

Local developer John Gleason will support the volunteer trail crew as they level several campsites, rehabilitate trails, construct handicap

youth group area will be very beneficial."

The friends have now raised more than half of the \$100,000 needed in local contributions for their campground improvement

project. The Iowa Values Fund will cover remaining project costs. That group has pledged roughly \$1.47 for every \$1 the friends raise.

"The gifts are really magnified by our relationship with the Iowa Value's Fund," said friends president Joe Mohrhauser. "The true economic impact to Sioux City is about two-and-one-half times [the actual gift]."

The friends' project aims to revitalize various campground facilities, which should boost

tourism both in the park and in surrounding areas, Mohrhauser said.

"I hope it increases usage of the campground dramatically," he said. "It's another way to encourage people to visit Sioux City."

Work on the \$250,000 project began in December of



Volunteers and construction workers assembling a cabin this October

building to be replaced and several 50-year-old campsites to be upgraded.

Also in September, the AmeriCorps trail crew made plans to help transform the Coon Hollow Picnic Area into a youth campground – part of

access for a new parking area and build an outdoor amphitheater with a fire ring.

(AmeriCorps is a national organization that funds service positions across the country, including 47 within the Iowa DNR.)

"Some of the facilities will be a lot newer," Veon said of the project. "As people drive by and see the camping cabins, it's going to bring people into the park. The

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Kudos! Friends groups prove worth with awards, nominations

A note from Keepers of the Land director Merry Rankin



Kudos to our outstanding volunteers!

It's that time of the year – when the Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program sends out a call to all staff to nominate their outstanding volunteers.

With every year's nominations, everyone in the volunteer program and the department is reminded of the invaluable service, support, and dedication our volunteers provide to us and to Iowa's natural resources.

I specifically bring your attention to the awards this year because our friends groups were well-represented.

Our awards are given in five categories. This year, three of the five showcased our friends' outstanding successes. In the category of Outstanding Small Project Volunteer Award, for example, nominees included the Cornman Triathlon, an annual fundraising project of Union Grove State Park's friends group, Lake Park and Holding Corporation (see page 3 for related article).

Also nominated in this category were Rodger Burch and the Springbrook Friends

Group, for their basketball court project (featured in our spring newsletter).

In another category, the Outstanding Group Volunteer Award, top honors went to a friends group. Lake Park and Holding Corporation was honored for their tireless work and dedication to Union Grove State Park.

Among the many contributions noted, they were specifically recognized and commended for their fabulous team ethic in working hand-in-hand with DNR staff in planning and implementing priority projects.

Finally, the Rock Creek State Park employees – nomi-

nated by the Rock Creek Lake Alliance Friends Group – won top honors in this year's DNR Staff Award.

Alliance president Pat Patty noted the countless improvements and educational events they had completed thanks to their partnership with Rock Creek's ranger, manager, and other park employees. She also noted the invaluable advisory assistance DNR staff have provided since the group's beginning.

These honorees will be officially recognized at the Keepers of the Land Volunteer Banquet on November 12, 2005. Congratulations and thanks!

Field Report: Updates from other friends groups

The **Pilot Knob** "Horses R Us Saddle Club" added hitching rails and completed trail cleanup this summer. They're working on adding horse camping to the park.



The **Ft. Atkinson** friends worked all summer setting up the annual Ft. Atkinson Rendezvous, held Sept. 23 -25. This living history event included a school day, which attracted over 1200 students from 22 schools, some as far as 100 miles away.

The **Stone Park** friends helped host the Broken-Toe fun run and the third annual Lewis and Clark Marathon. See **page 1** for more about this group.

The **Walnut Woods** friends continue to work towards non-profit status a new playground.

The **Union Grove** friends helped with mowing, litter removal and more. See **page 3**.

The **Prairie Rose** friends purchased 8 new picnic grills and installed 4. They split and cut firewood to sell at the park, served 205 people at a pancake breakfast and 145 people at a Labor Day weekend barbecue, selling t-shirts and hats at both events. They hosted 35 children and families on Free Fishing Weekend, offering free ice cream sundaes and contests.



A new group at **Maquoketa Caves** formed last September, and hopes to become a friends group. Already, they have recruited volunteers for their visitor's center and expanded its hours. They purchased a brochure rack and worked with DNR officials and local master gardeners on landscaping. Local grants and donations funded highway and "open" signs, window trim and a bench. They've done PR on radio shows, newspapers and a Historical Society meeting.

The **Mines of Spain** friends continue fundraising for a proposed \$1.2 million addition to their nature center. They have worked on a video of the park and created an 8-page, full-color brochure for use in fundraising. The friends held their annual appreciation dinner on Oct. 15. They also wrote a \$7,500 grant for audio recorders and applied for designation as a Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Site.

The **Cedar Rock** friends hosted "An afternoon with Frank Lloyd Wright" on Oct. 15



The **Wildcat Den** friends installed an historically accurate roof and smokestack at the Pine Creek Grist Mill. They restored a steam engine and 12-foot fly wheel. The park hosted 91 participants at their 5K trail run/walk and 850 people at their Heritage Day celebration. They also hosted the Midwest Parks Executive Conference.



Run, bike and swim: "Cornman" visits Union Grove

by Michael Dhar

A jog around Union Grove Lake will put precisely five kilometers on your sneakers – by coincidence, the exact length needed for a triathlon running event.

This, and other features of Union Grove State Park, make it an ideal setting for the Cornman Triathlon, held at the park every July.

Local volunteer Todd Eipperle first organized the USA Triathlon-sanctioned event in 1997. This year, roughly 300 athletes participated – and more than 100 volunteers provided the extra hands and back muscle that make the event happen.

Volunteers – including members of Union Grove's friends group – are vital to the race's success, said Union Grove Park Manager Frank Rickerl.

"Something like this, without the volunteers, you couldn't hold it," he said. "It would be almost impossible without them."

Volunteers assemble and tear down equipment needed for the race, including scaffolding at the finish line and racks for more than 300 bikes.

During the race, volunteers help staff water and aid stations, shepherd athletes through the race's various portions, sweep gravel from roadways, time racers, direct traffic, distribute refreshments and more.

Various groups near Union Grove supply volunteers every year – including bike clubs and Scout Troops. One crew

of local motorcyclists gives rides to race monitors, so that they can move from start to finish lines.

Union Grove's friends group, the Lake Park and Holding Corp., contributed about 20 volunteers this year.



Gladbrook and back.

Both participants and townspeople relish that part of the race, since residents get to cheer for

the athletes, Eipperle said.

During the triathlon's running segment, competitors take a sprint around Union

event, it manages to bring in a lot of outside visitors as well.

"It draws a lot of people to the park, people who might not normally come," Rickerl said. "They see our lake, how beautiful and peaceful it is, and go home and tell people about it. It's a good advertisement."

This year, race organizers managed to attract one especially skittish park "visitor" – money. Eipperle recently purchased much of the equipment he had rented in years past. As a result, he saved on rental fees and the race made enough profit to donate \$2,000 to Union Grove.

Park officials used the money to buy a new boat, a portable defibrillator and a GPS receiver.

Eipperle, a long-time tri-athlete himself, created the event after a neighbor convinced him to do so. Eipperle had organized 5K and 10K

races in the past, and decided to try his hand at a



Volunteers set up all the equipment and scaffolding needed during the race

"The very first year, Todd asked if we could help and we have ever since," said Union Grove Friends Group president Bill Fry. "It's a neat thing for the park."

The Cornman Triathlon makes good use of Union Grove's physical features. The triathlon's 500-meter swim event takes athletes on an out-and-back loop from the lake's swimming beach.

During the bike portion of the triathlon, competitors pedal around the lake, through the park, into the town of

Grove Lake. The route includes one large hill and several smaller ones – important features in a good race-track, Eipperle said.

"The neatest thing about the park is that everything you need is right there," he said. "The beach is right there, the road is the perfect distance. It's scenic and hilly."

The Cornman occurs at the end of an annual community celebration in nearby Gladbrook called the "Corn Carnival." While the Triathlon also serves as a community

triathlon.

The event attracted roughly 100 participants its first year and 200 the next year. Two years ago, about 400 people participated.

Organizers decided the event was getting too big for its own good, and have backed off on advertising. Relying simply on return participants and word-of-mouth advertising, the event now steadily signs up about 300 racers.

Friends Group's Commitment Brings Results

Stone

Continued from page 1

last year, though planning had been in the works for more than a year and a half.

Citizens first met to form

a friends group in March, 2003. They devised a three-phase, strategic plan over the following several months.

The project will draw new people to the park, bringing in many visitors who might have

otherwise ignored it, said Park Ranger Matt Veon.

"When a state park is small in size, there are only certain things you can do to attract visitors," he said.

"Now that we're getting some more attractive facilities in place, it may convince people to want to experience the park a little more."

The new pledges of support show how effective the Stone State Park Friends have been, Veon said. They have proven capable of handling a



The new cabin nears completion

large project and shown the commitment to follow it through, he said.

"You have to have volunteers that want to stick with it," he said. "When you have a group like this with a strong backbone, you get a lot done. We're seeing results."

Stone park funding sources

- * **Loess Hills Alliance: \$8,000 grant**
- * **L & L Construction: Log cabin assembly (\$7,000 in-kind donation)**
- * **AmeriCorps Trail Crew: Campground construction.**
- * **Iowa Values fund: \$1.47 match for every \$1 raised**
- * **Various local supporters**

Calendar

November

* **Nov. 12:** Keepers of the Land Volunteer Awards Banquet, 9:30 a.m – 1:30 p.m., Science Center, Des Moines.

* **Nov. 15:** Former park ranger Dale Brumm will present a slide show on Stone State Park's history, 7 p.m., at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center, Sioux City.

December

* **December:** Planning meeting for next year's 30th anniversary Ft. Atkinson Rendezvous.

Look for more volunteer news and events at:
www.keepersoftheland.org

January

* **Sundays:** Winter Sunday Programs at Mines of Spain State Park. See www.minesofspain.org for details.

* **January:** Lion's Club Annual Ice Fishing Derby, Union Grove Lake. Lunch and registration at the Youth Center.

February

* **Sundays:** Winter Sunday Programs at Mines of Spain State Park. See www.minesofspain.org for details.